OCT 14 '75

INDIANA COLLECTION
Highland - Churches
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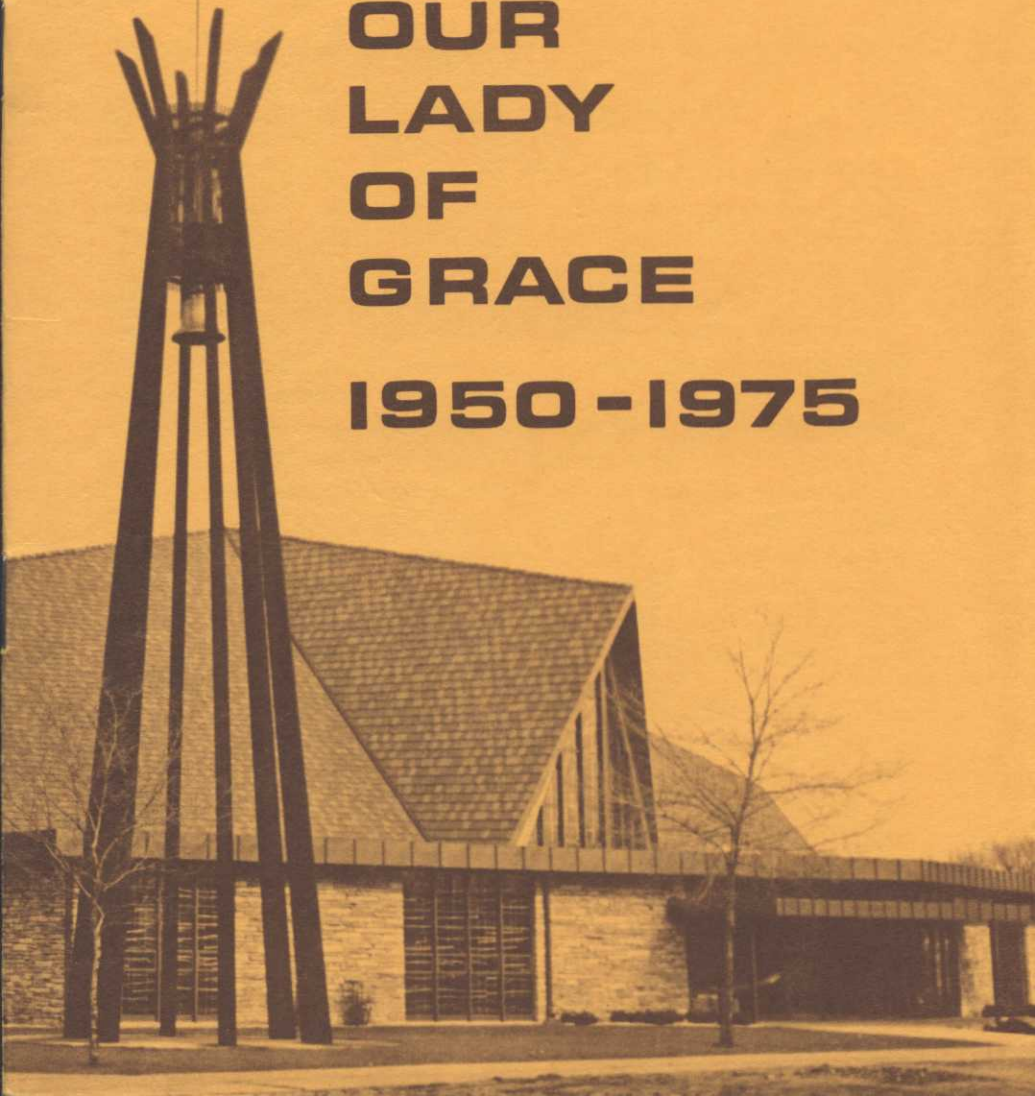
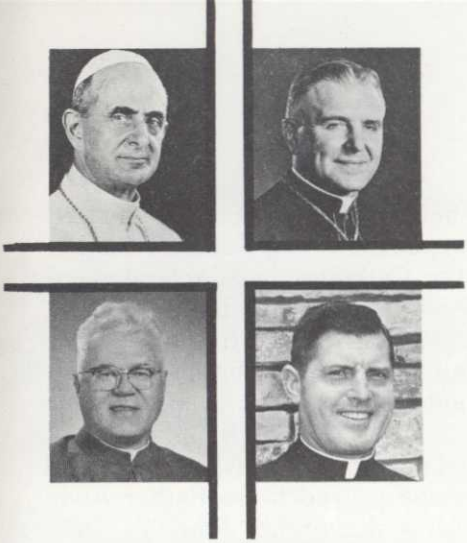
I am the vine,
you are the branches.
He who lives in me,
and I in him,
will bear much fruit.

OUR LADY OF GRACE

1950 - 1975





Pope Paul VI

Bishop Andrew G. Grutka

Msgr. Alvin J. Jasinski

Rev. Albert H. Van Nevel

25th Anniversary
Our Lady of Grace, Highland

Laughter rose from a hearty crowd as the Assistant Pastor was dunked in water and parish members "let their hair down" at the highly successful and fun-filled Our Lady of Grace Family Festivals. Shouts of excited prize winners, toots of the children's train, and happy sounds of merriment filled the air as hundreds of people, maybe thousands, flocked around raffle booths and luscious-smelling food stands. These were the mid-1960's and the people of Our Lady of Grace were working together to eliminate the school debt and fund the new church construction.

In 1950, Father Alvin Jasinski, now deceased, stated what was needed: "Gratitude to God and to those people of Highland who have lent a hand fills our hearts as we greet you today. Soon we hope to see the entire flock make this parish church their own, and working together as a unit, establish a real church and school and all that a parish unit requires. Let us begin and remain united in prayer. . ."

Prayer and family festivals, and Mass, Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, weddings, funerals, school, work and joyful celebrations, all the activities that go into building a community of God,—through the years these events and the people were one in our Lord in a parish known as Our Lady of Grace. It all began 25 years ago. . .

In the years immediately before 1950, the whole nation was experiencing a post-war expansion. The Calumet Region was no exception, and soon the Catholics in Highland were to be numerous enough to need a church of their own. For this purpose, in 1947 the Diocese purchased a tract of land at Highway and Fifth Streets. But much had to be done before the land could become productive.

The church could not build itself. A parish family and leader was needed. That someone proved to be Father Alvin Jasinski, appointed by the Most Reverend John F. Noll, Bishop of Fort Wayne. On September 22, 1949, the parishioners met with their pastor for the first time at St. Mary's in Griffith, where he had set up his temporary residence. Friendship, respect, and unity of purpose between pastor and parishioners quickly flourished.

A name was needed for the little parish. Having a great devotion for the Blessed Mother, Father Alvin was delighted when the name "Our Lady of Grace" was approved by the Bishop on October 7. The parish was on its way!

The embryo parish of about 300 members celebrated the birth of Christ with a Mass at the Town Theatre on Kennedy Avenue December 25, 1949.

Naturally, a more permanent place was needed to celebrate Mass. Since Bishop Noll advised against the idea of any new construction, plans were formed and completed to acquire the Calvary Baptist Church property on Jewett Street. Armed with paint brushes and hammers, enthusiastic and hard-working parishioners converted the Jewett Street building into Highland's first Catholic Church. On October 29, 1950, they proudly celebrated the feast of Christ the King in their church. Their first communion class received Holy Eucharist on April 8, while a week later the Most Reverend Leo A. Pursley, Auxiliary Bishop of Fort Wayne, came to OLG to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. The parish of Our Lady of Grace had begun the work of the Lord!

But the present church capacity was only 98, so plans were made to enlarge the little church within one year. Once more parishioners banded together and on October 28, 1951, a new addition was dedicated by Bishop Pursley. Church capacity had risen from 98 to 298 people. Events such as the first solemn novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and the first Forty Hours Adoration of the Eucharist typified the prayerful, worshipful attitude of the parish.

Father Alvin and his parishioners soon found the addition was not enough for the rapidly growing group of Catholics. Together they dreamed of a new, larger church in which to worship, and a school to give the Word of God to their children. In July, 1953, a Foundation Fund Drive was held and $273,000 was pledged over a five-year period for the church. That same month, Father Charles Froelich was sent to help Father Alvin as our first assistant pastor. There were now 540 families in the new parish.

The following February 6, ground was broken for the new church and school at the Highway Avenue property purchased in 1947.

1954 was a notable year for OLG for many reasons, not the least of which was that the Sisters of St. Francis had agreed to teach at the new school. A house located at 2930 Franklin Street became their home.

A few months later, July 11, construction on the church-school began with Monsignor Edward Mungovan of All Saints in Hammond, blessing the cornerstone of the new structure.

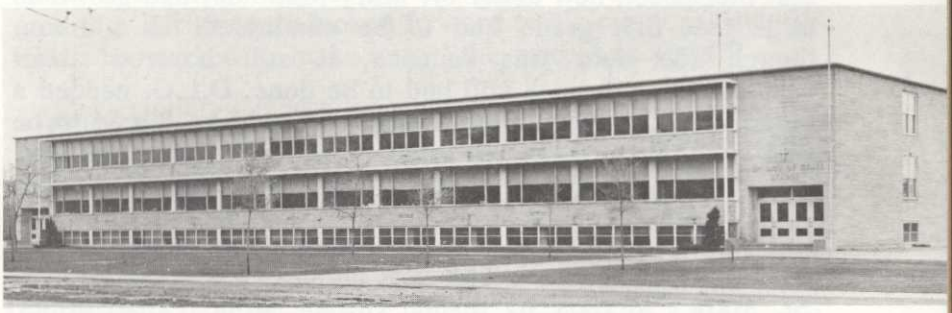
A construction-filled summer slipped by and September was around the corner, yet the new school building was not ready. But 291 students, 3 lay teachers and 3 sisters were ready to start the school year. So, headed by principal Sister Mary Frieda, all but the seventh and eighth grade pupils, who had classes at St. Mary's in Griffith, attended 8:00 Mass every morning in the church. The students then treked through all kinds of weather to the American Legion on Ridge Road and the neighboring Presbyterian Church Hall for classes. Books were kept in boxes at their sides, while teachers taught from cardtables.

Finally, in December, the students moved their books to the six classrooms which were completed at the one-story limestone school on Highway Avenue. The remaining class-

rooms, along with the new basement church, were finished later that year. Mass was offered for the first time in the new church in April of 1955. It was dedicated by Bishop Pursley in September of the same year. The parish now had 2,611 members (728 families), and the school 488 students. Expansion was becoming an ever-present factor at our parish.

As the school enrollment grew to over 700, the much needed second story was begun and completed in 1956. Our new Bishop of Gary, Andrew G. Grutka, dedicated it on October 27. Besides classrooms, the addition included a convent and much-needed library.

Unfortunately, as parish and school grew, so did the church debt. It now exceeded a half million dollars. To reduce it, parishioners launched the Debt Reduction program in July of 1958. Parishioners went door to door to their fellow parishioners for a second time seeking sufficient pledges to overcome the debt.



By 1960 the school was again overcrowded. Over 1,000 students filled the halls. Soon hot lunch programs had to be dropped so that three temporary classrooms could be partitioned off in the cafeteria.

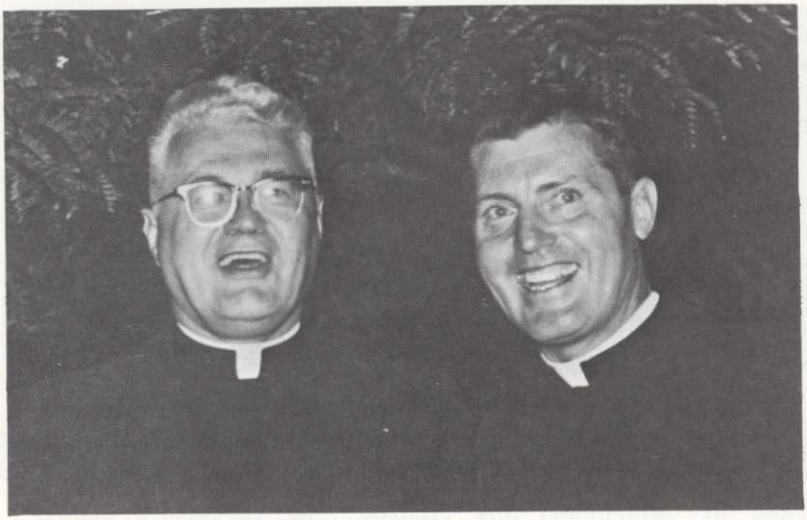
October of that year brought with it the tenth anniversary of Our Lady of Grace. After worshipping with a special Mass of Thanksgiving, the parishioners musically, dramatically, and prayerfully commemorated the milestone with a program at St. Thomas More's gymnasium. Remembered were such special events as Father Carl Mengeling returning home to celebrate his first Mass in May, '57, along with the annual social gatherings; the picnics, ice cream socials, Family Nights, and grade school basketball games. And, of course, our religious heritage was depicted, for Our Lady of Grace was a living, joyful body in Christ, now over 5,000 strong.

Another happy anniversary arrived soon: In 1962, Father Alvin celebrated 25 good years laboring for the Lord. The parish joined and thanked him with a special program.

Besides this happy event, 1962 ushered in a less welcome era: the school, now under Sr. Mary Mathilde, had grown so large that first grade had to be eliminated. In addition, though the debt was reduced, it still hovered about $300,000.00 and much still had to be done. O.L.G. needed a bigger church. Soon, Sunday Masses would be forced to be said simultaneously in two sections of the school basement, the church and cafeteria, and at both 10:00 and 11:15 A.M.

Then in 1963, a major change came about in the parish. Father Alvin, whose health was ebbing, was transferred to St. Mark's in Gary by Bishop Grutka, while Father Albert Van Nevel of Notre Dame of Michigan City became the new shepherd of the ever-growing flock in Highland, now numbering 1,500 families.

In announcing the move of the beloved pastor, the Bishop predicted the people would ultimately "understand the wisdom of the change."



Immediately the parishioners took to their energetic new leader who introduced himself in his first sermon as "Father Van Nevel, not Father Van Devil". For years to come, a strong stride and a black flowing cape was to be his trademark, a cheerful "top of the morning" to be his personal greeting. Parishioners looked forward to his many projects in which he worked to make sure "the price was right"!

In the following months, parish members, along with their enthusiastic new pastor, realized the need to expand in the way of a new and much larger church. However, plans could not immediately be made because of the still considerable church debt. Stressing parish generosity, first and foremost, not necessarily financial, but in giving time and labor too, Father Van Nevel brought a great spirit, ideas and methods, and a new project; a project that would bring the parish family closer together, eliminate the parish debt, and start funding a new church; an endeavor that was so successful that many of us will remember it for years to come. The project introduced by Father Van became known as the Family Festivals.

Weeks and weeks of preparation took place before the gala event. Children saved their money and parents, 500 or more, joined committees, developed booths and prepared for the festivals.

Finally, the big night arrived. Bright lights and colorful booths lined the church grounds as noisy, laughter-filled crowds got together for an evening of fun and prizes. Diets were forgotten as hot dogs, tacos and homemade goodies were devoured while participating in the games. The parish nest egg grew as did spirit, devotion and unity, as parish members worked together toward their common goal.

Using over 1,100 chickens, and 2,700 ears of corn, the chicken dinner was held the following day, wrapping up an exciting and enjoyable weekend. The festivals served their purpose amazingly well socially and financially. In 1963, (only Saturday and Sunday) they netted $40,974.00 after expenses, in 1964 (expanding to Friday) $45,000.00 and in 1965, $50,000.00.

With this impetus and increased giving, the parish debt was soon eliminated and there was a storehouse of enthusiasm and fervor awaiting the new church!

The year 1966 saw the parish grow to 2,000 families.

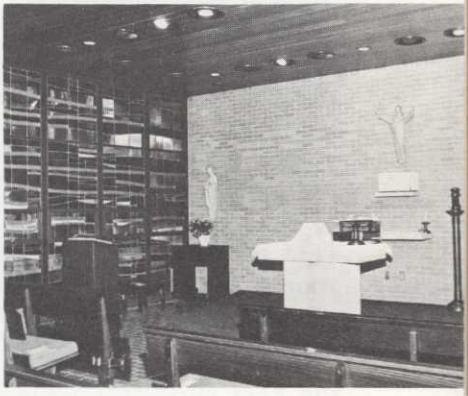
In the weeks to follow, parishioners once again had reason to celebrate. On September 3, 1966, land was finally broken for the new church! Following Masses, parishioners would stroll through the construction-filled church area amazed at the largeness and uniqueness of the new church structure, anxious for its completion.

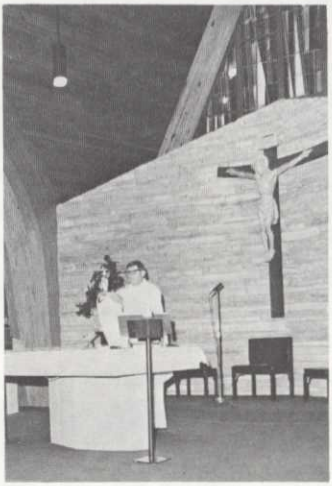
1967 was a time for celebrating. Parishioners gathered together to honor Father Van Nevel on the 25th anniversary of his ordination. The event was celebrated with a Mass followed by a reception at Highland High's cafetorium hosted by the parish societies. Father Van joined in the laughter and fun of the evening as he watched himself being imitated in a comical skit performed by parish members.

As 1967 drew to a close, a long-time dream became a reality as the new church was dedicated on December 10. A proud pastor, together with his parishioners, celebrated with a joyful Mass filled with music and thankful prayer. An album, recording all of the choir's songs and the high points of the beautiful ceremony, was made available to the parishioners several weeks after the dedication. The record served as a lasting memorial of the joyful dedication.

The church is the largest new church in the Gary Diocese, contemporary yet elegant in style, with seating for 1,400 people in the main nave. Used for smaller services and some daily Masses, the Blessed Sacrament Chapel provides a serene setting for individual prayer, while the Tiny Tots Chapel serves families with small children. The new church was to serve a parish body of 8,303 members (1,971 families) in 1967, and was mortgage free!

Now the cafeteria and western section of the basement, formerly used for Masses, could be renovated. Once again the sound of hammering and sawing could be heard as parish carpenters and painters, both professional and amateur, changed the basement into new classrooms and a larger library.





The pride and generosity of home craftsmanship remained with the parish throughout the years. In the fall of 1974, the men of our parish completed the new sisters' home on the northeast corner of Condit and Fifth. Exceptionally well designed and executed, it's an asset to the community. Our craftsmen then took their skills once more to the second floor of the school. Here they renovated the sisters' former convent into classrooms. With the addition of these new classrooms, the first grade at our school was again resumed. And all this was accomplished in just three months!

Today, Our Lady of Grace prides itself on having one of the best and most productive schools in the region, thanks primarily to the dedication of the Sisters of St. Francis and lay teachers on the professional staff headed by Sr. Mary Clarice. In addition, modern audio-visual aid equipment and television sets, are basic to the educational program. Serving the students this year is an enlarged, modernized library complete with individualized study corrals—another source of pride to our home craftsmen!

Seventh and eighth grade students now enjoy special mini-courses designed to help them expand in interest areas and skills such as sewing, journalism, industrial arts, etc. Career classes are also offered to the junior high students, preparing them for the high school years ahead.

O.L.G. students are also provided with an extensive physical education program. Held in the cafeteria or out of doors, these classes emphasize physical fitness, team and individual sports.

Extra-curricular activities also play a big part in the grade school curricula. Throughout the years, the band program at Our Lady of Grace has grown to 39 members. Aside from improving individual talent, band members enter several competitions and march in area parades.

A large percentage of the students are interested in athletics. The sports program, started with a boys basketball team in 1955, now includes a variety of girls' sports as well as boys'. The Our Lady of Grace KNIGHTS are part of the South Suburban League, a league which many of our parish men were instrumental in starting.

Craftsmen, coaches, librarians, teachers aides, room mothers, parents—they all voluntarily give up their time to be a part of the O.L.G. school team. Through the combined effort of the professional staff and these and many other volunteers, thousands of dollars have been saved.

And above all this and throughout the years of progress and change, one factor in our total school system remains unchanged—learning to know, love and serve God. This is primary! A 1965 graduate of this tradition, Deacon James Dvorscak is scheduled to be ordained a priest soon.

Accordingly, Our Lady of Grace also provides religious instruction for those students attending the public schools. The C.C.D. program, staffed by volunteers, conducts weekly classes during the school year.

To know, love and serve God is the purpose of our adult organizations too.

Responding to the call from Vatican II, our Parish Council was formed in 1968. Made up of various committees: education, social, youth, spiritual, etc., the aim of the Council is to assist the Pastor in the works of the parish. Our Council quickly became a model for neighboring parishes.

Participation in the ecumenical movement resulting from Vatican II, brought joyful sounds and chords of "halleluja" resounding from the church as the "Messiah" was performed the summer of 1970. Choir members of churches of other Christian denominations, dressed in robes of their respective churches, joined together with our choir to sing the famous piece by Handel. Held at Our Lady of Grace, this inter-faith movement brought about a deeper understanding and respect between neighboring churches. Following the performance, a social hour was held in the cafeteria.

Throughout the years, various social and service organizations have played a dynamic part in the parish structure. Each Sunday before Mass, enthusiastic announcements of group activities can be heard.

Seeking to bring together parents and faculty, the Home and School Association has been in existence for 21 years. Some of the group's activities include pancake breakfasts, the Sisters' pantry shower, and fund-raising projects designed to purchase modern school equipment. For months, children look forward to the ice cream socials sponsored by the Home and School Association.

Potlucks, glamorous style shows, senior citizen outings, peaceful days of recollection—these are just a few of the many activities of the Altar and Rosary Sodality. The club sponsors charitable service projects as well as social gatherings, and has contributed thousands of dollars to the parish.

Just as the ladies have the Altar and Rosary, the men of the parish have the Holy Name Society. This club is well known for contributions raised through their smokers and

golf outings. The Scouts of the parish look forward to their annual corporate Communion and breakfast, sponsored by the Holy Name.

C.Y.O. (Christian Youth Organization) is the club provided for the teenagers of the parish. To raise money for club events, car washes and bake sales are held. The summer months are filled with fun-filled outings to the dunes and to amusement parks. Various service projects also make up the group's activities.

"Strike up the band and make way for the famous Kitchenetters!" And with cheers of applause and shouts of laughter, the Kitchenetters once more reached the hearts of an appreciative audience.

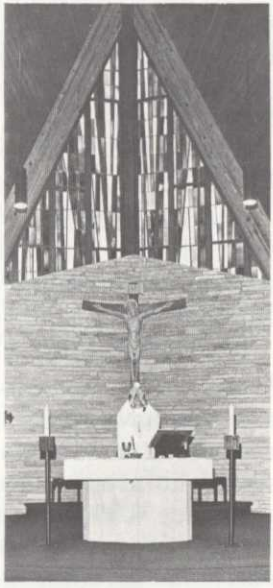
The Kitchenetters, armed with home-made, kitchen-utensil instruments, and costumed in colorful headpieces, brought our parish together with other communities through fun-filled entertainment.

Culinary secrets of parish members were revealed in "The Melting Pot", a best-seller at Our Lady of Grace. This book, a collection of old family and ethnic recipes along with private creations and favorite stand-bys, was sponsored by the school librarians. Containing over 375 recipes, the book has sold over 4,500 copies in three printings. In order to assure the quality and delectability of each contribution, a tasting party was given in the church cafeteria prior to publication of the book. Over 100 ladies came to put their specialties to the test of their peers.

The parish organizations have given parishioners opportunities to strike up new friendships and to serve others both within and outside the parish. On a deeper level, the organizations give people a chance to spread Christ's love through action.

If one word can describe Our Lady of Grace, it is "unique". In an unique situation, Bishop Andrew Grutka ordained Father Bernard Welsh in his own parish—Our Lady of Grace. A few years later, Father Van Nevel was given the special and unique authority to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation within his own parish. We are nearly unique in being debt free, and one of the few schools to be tuition free as well. Consequently, Our Lady of Grace has a waiting list to enter school.

We could go on with "unique" attributes. And not from pride but from thanks. The Lord has been good to Our Lady of Grace over the 25 years.



Again I tell you,
if two of you join your voices on earth
to pray for anything whatever,
it shall be granted to you
by my Father in heaven.
Where two or three are gathered in my name,
there am I in their midst.

Dear Parishioner,

I am very grateful to Monsignor Alvin Jasinski for the wonderful start he gave Our Lady of Grace, and to all of you for your continued cooperation.

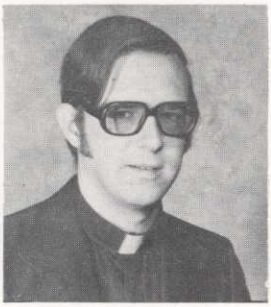
I pray that with God's help we may continue to work and sacrifice together.

As I have often said in the past, you never stand still - you either go forward or you are sliding back.

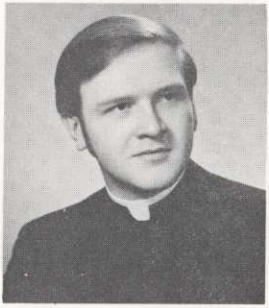
With God's help and your cooperation, may we continue to go forward.

Thank You and God Bless You,

Rev. A. H. Vander Nevels



Rev. Richard Orlinski



Rev. Edward Moszur

Our thanks to all who helped prepare this souvenir booklet, especially writers Kathy Sarnecki and Leslie Shiel.

The Anniversary Committee